

C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 000737

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/23/2014

TAGS: PREL PGOV GT BH

SUBJECT: GOG TO IMPROVE INFORMAL TIES WITH BELIZE

Classified By: PolOff Robert E. Copley for reason 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: At our request, Foreign Minister Jorge Briz discussed the border dispute with Ambassador Hamilton and British Ambassador Richard Lavers on March 17. Briz said that the Berger Administration wants to develop close, informal ties with its Belizean counterpart and to engage in as many joint initiatives, both public and private, as possible. The goal is to demonstrate to both populations the benefits of a normal relationship, thereby garnering support for an eventual referendum on a settlement. According to Briz, Guatemala does not/not want to take the border dispute to the International Court of Justice, and is prepared to extend the confidence building measures for a full year when the current 90-day extension expires in May. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Briz began by stating that even if the Berger Administration were enthusiastic about the facilitators' proposed solutions (which it is not), the required referendum has no chance of approval by the Guatemalan public at this time. Thus the task, according to Briz, is to change public opinion. The Berger Administration wants to develop the sort of close, informal ties with its Belizean counterpart that will allow the two governments to demonstrate the benefits of a more normal relationship to their respective populations. Guatemala's approach will be to pursue as many joint initiatives, both public and private, with Belize as possible. Briz hopes that Belize can be sold on the advantages of developing this kind of relationship and will avoid what he called "radical" positions.

¶3. (C) Briz said Guatemala wants continued OAS involvement, but was vague as to how the OAS should engage. Briz was emphatic that Guatemala does not/not want to take the dispute to the International Court of Justice at the Hague and said that Vice Minister Skinner-Klee's musings in Washington about the advantages of that route had been just that, not considered government opinion. Briz also said that Guatemala had informed Belize that it is prepared to extend the confidence building measures for a full year when they expire in May.

¶4. (C) On the substance of the dispute itself, Briz was cautious but said Guatemala needs "juridical certainty" of its right to access to the sea. Drawn out again by Lavers, he added that two processes, an OAS process working on the dispute itself, and an informal process creating the ambiance in both countries for a better relationship, could go forward in parallel. Briz hopes to establish a mechanism for regular informal and friendly consultations with Belize and noted that, while Ambassador Martinez is a personal friend, that mechanism ought to be linked to some senior official in Belize.

¶5. (C) In a separate conversation with the Ambassador on March 19, Belizean Ambassador to Guatemala Alfredo Martinez said that Briz's proposal would be acceptable to Belize provided it leads to real progress toward eventual resolution of the border issue. He suggested that patience for Guatemalan dilatory tactics is running thin in Belize. Nevertheless, Martinez said he had already developed a list of 11 practical measures (e.g. harmonizing the hours of border crossings) which would help normalize relations for shared benefit. He said he had urged Briz to improve relations and communication by bypassing or diluting the power of the MFA's advisory Belize Commission.

¶6. (C) Comment: This was a positive meeting that shows the Berger Administration has been giving serious thought to the border dispute and recognizes the work it needs to do in leading public opinion toward accepting a negotiated solution. We are encouraged by the GOG's new willingness to reach out to Belize on numerous levels in search of solutions to the many problems along the border. Joint cross-border initiatives, whether public or private, will reduce opportunities for flare-ups, as will extending the confidence building measures. The British government is already involved in many such projects, and we will look for opportunities to pitch in.

HAMILTON